



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

September 15, 1998

Patricia Fisher, USFWS, 202-208-5634
Jane Ballentine, AZA, 301-907-7777 ext. 236

AZA AND USFWS FORGE NEW AGREEMENT FOR CONSERVATION OF NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE AND THEIR HABITATS

Tulsa, Oklahoma--North American wildlife and their habitats received a boost today when U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark, American Zoo and Aquarium Association President David Towne, and AZA Executive Director Sydney J. Butler signed an agreement that provided wildlife protection in a new way. The memorandum of understanding, signed during AZA's 74th annual conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma, establishes a broad framework for species-based conservation efforts. In a new twist, it also united Service and AZA efforts to educate the American public about the biological, economic, and aesthetic contributions native species and their habitats make to the Nation's quality of life.

"I am very excited about the potential for partnerships that exists between the members of the AZA and the Service," said Clark. "As much as I have watched our progress with some highly visible species such as the California condor and the red wolf, I have also followed the hard work zoos undertake in supporting the recovery of lesser known species, including the Wyoming toad, Karner blue butterfly, and Colorado River and desert fishes."

"AZA has long worked with the dedicated professionals at the Service toward species recovery," said Towne, who is also director of Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo. "This MOU will strengthen the ties of the science-based programs and the potential for development of public education and outreach programs is enormous when approached cooperatively."

In the MOU Statement of Mutual Agreement, AZA and the Service agree:

- o to seek opportunities to work together to support the conservation needs of all native North American species and their habitats where the Service has the authority to do so and when consistent with the mission and purpose of AZA;
- o to help their respective AZA member institutions and Service regional and field offices identify and assess the potential cooperative actions for conservation partnerships;
- o to encourage participation by the AZA in the development of Service recovery plans for Federally listed species;

- o to support appropriate research, education, conservation expertise, and the transfer of information and technology to enhance the formal recovery program process for Federally listed species and to promote the development and implementation of a Species Survival Plan for native North American species most critically imperiled under the Endangered Species Act; and
- o to periodically assess project collaborations between the cooperators and other mutual partners.

"As we move into the new century, in our fight to conserve wildlife and their habitats, the best defense is no fence," said Clark. "Because conservation issues affect everyone's lives, it is vital to enlist people outside our agency in finding solutions rather than try and go it alone. No government agency or private organization can meet this Nation's conservation challenges by itself."

"The 120 million people who visit AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums know what an elephant is or what a shark looks like," stated Butler, "but how many have seen a Wyoming toad or California condor? We have long focused on exotic animals rather than the creatures in our own back yards. We are thrilled to continue our association with the Service and look forward to the experiences this MOU brings to our members and their visitors."

"It is appropriate that this MOU is being signed at the beginning of the school year because the partnership among zoos, aquariums, and the Service is of particular benefit to educators and students. As children head back to school, they can look forward to increasing educational opportunities on critical issues facing our Nation's fish and wildlife," commented Clark.

AZA will work through its North American Fauna Interest Group to prioritize North American species and related programs. AZA was founded in 1924 and currently represents 184 accredited zoos and aquariums throughout North America. AZA's mission is to support membership excellence in conservation, education, science, and recreation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores

nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

-FWS-

Note: For a complete copy of the MOU between AZA and the Service, please contact Jane Ballentine at 301-907-777 ext. 236 or Dave Harrelson at 703-358-2171.